

# **Lessons Learned from the Southern Africa Workshop on Strengthening National Responses to OVC**

## **I. Pre-workshop Arrangements**

### **1.0 Consensus with Partners**

Obtaining consensus among the key partners is essential but can be a lengthy process. Once the major partners have given their consent however, the process evolves smoothly. In this particular meeting, one of the major partners, the Government of Lesotho was brought on board rather late. Enlisting a willing and supportive government like the Government of Lesotho is critical for the success of the workshop. The use of conference calls and email with stipulated deadlines for responding, when communicating with partners enhanced the quality and pace of the process.

### **2.0 Selection of and Communicating with Country Delegations**

The single most protracted step in the process was the selection and confirmation of country delegations. We did not allow sufficient time for this to happen with the level of detail and wide consultation required. In some cases, country delegations barely had a week from the time of first notification to the actual workshop. This meant that in some cases, the lead agencies in country used a selection process, which, even though it identified the right participants, might in the long run limit the success of follow up, as issues of legitimacy and ownership could pop up.

The presence of USAID Missions, UNICEF country offices and FHI presence, with highly supportive officials made the communication with country delegations and their travel facilitation much smoother.

All the country delegations in the end included high senior government persons either at the level of Permanent Secretary or Director. This is critical for ownership of the output of the workshop (the deliverable) and for follow up purposes. It enhances commitment to the process. In future, it might be better to encourage every delegation to include the PS of the respective government ministry.

### **3.0 Overall Technical Objective and Outcome of the Workshop**

In as much as we had a picture of the broader outcome desired for this meeting, it took too long agreeing on what the real technical objective should be. This to some extent affected the working consensus on the structure of the workshop. The excellent teamwork and flexibility of the steering committee, during the workshop adjusted for this as it allowed for critical adjustments to be made in the schedule, to incorporate additional technical elements as they emerged.

### **4.0 Facilitation (Resource persons, Consultants and Moderators)**

The use of consultants who are familiar with the issues surrounding orphans and vulnerable children in general and the strengthening of national responses in particular was a big asset. Limiting the number of external resource persons, in preference for people those that had been part of the planning process, in the end worked well as it minimised the ‘towering effect of experts’, which could have undermined the confidence of country delegations to develop their national response strategies in their best interest.

The following overall principles were adopted for facilitation:

1. Focusing the workshop on five thematic areas relating to national response (participatory situation analysis; (strategic) planning for national action; monitoring and evaluation; policy and legislative review; consultation and coordination). The purpose was to build capacity (skills, plans, commitment, contacts) within participating countries so they could meet their obligations to OVC in terms of UNGASS. It was, however, obvious that there was a real need among delegates to share programmatic experience (eg: psycho-social support, ensuring access to education etc.)
2. Sharing of experience between countries, rather than directed learning by “experts”. This was further reinforced by drawing on technical moderators from the region where possible. It is not certain whether all of the delegates were aware that this was a conscious decision, but many passed comments along the line of: “I never realised there was so much we could learn from our neighbours.” Within the resource team, this workshop was considered to be a major paradigm shift, moving the core of knowledge sources and expertise from “the north” to the affected countries.
3. Directing all effort towards the compilation by each country team of a matrix of “next-steps” which team members commit themselves to taking, in order to stimulate action in their countries. Once again, delegates commented very favourably on this, saying it helped to focus their thinking and reinforce their commitment to action. On the last day a group of three countries participating in a mini-plenary (see below) spontaneously linked hands and made a collective pledge to implement their “next-steps”.

## **II. The Workshop**

### **1.0 Daily structure: a four-part process was used, with 90 minutes allowed for each element:**

- a) A plenary session, at which a technical moderator briefly introduced the theme for the day, after which between two and four countries presented case studies on that theme. This was followed by plenary discussion to identify and clarify key issues emerging from the presentations. During this session, delegates were asked to identify a key issue which they felt required more discussion or explanation and write down that key issue on a card in the form of a question, for use during the next session.
- b) A moderated panel discussion/Q&A session, where a panel comprised of representatives of three countries (but not those who presented the case studies) with experience in the thematic area were invited to answer some of the questions posed by the audience (which had been sorted during a tea-break by the moderator). Delegates were encouraged to expand on the panellists’ answers, and the result was a lively – but structured – discussion, which many delegates found useful.
- c) This was followed by a simultaneous meeting of 10 inter-country (“mixed” or “cross-sectional”) working groups; and
- d) A simultaneous meeting of the 10 country delegations.
- e) The underlying principle was to create a progression as follows:
  - Experience (case histories) →

- Identification of key issues (plenary discussion, submission of questions) →
- Discussion of key issues in general terms (panel discussion) →
- Discussion of key issues in depth (mixed group discussion) →
- Prioritisation of action, allocation of responsibilities, setting of deadlines (country team discussions)

*Note that some variation was introduced to this pattern to allow for a field trip on the third afternoon, and to cover two themes on the fourth day (see the agenda for details).*

## **2.0 Some further analysis of the workshop process is offered below:**

- Case studies – instead of inviting countries to present overall reports on their progress in all five thematic areas, team-leaders were asked to present case studies on those activities which they considered to be their strongest suit. The decision on which country would present on each topic was made collectively by the country team-leaders in a facilitated meeting. Despite being given very little advance warning, this approach worked well but, as a number of delegates said in their evaluation, it would have been better still if the country teams had been told in advance of this methodology.
- Plenary discussions after the case studies were perhaps not as successful as the Q&A sessions, which followed them, because the plenary discussions tended to stray off the subject. The participants, especially from countries whose OVC programming is still in its infancy, were interested to hear from their colleagues on programming. In the last recap meeting with resource persons, a suggestion was made that appropriate questions could be “planted” among the audience, particularly at the beginning of the workshop when delegates are not yet sure of the scope of discussion, to help keep discussions on course.
- Panel discussions/Q&A sessions (“Oprah-style” with a high level of audience participation) were very effective. Questions submitted in advance and collated by the moderator (drawing on VIPP methodology) helped to keep participants to the subject. In addition, these questions gave an indicator of what the audience was thinking (very useful for the report!), allowed for genuine participation, and encouraged “active listening” on the part of the audience;
- Inter-country group work. These were probably the greatest success of the workshop and were praised by all concerned. The principle was to create small working groups made up of members of different country delegations. The underlying principle was to deliberately separate team members so they would not defer to the most senior/experienced/dominating person (as often happens when a country team is together) and to allow for the widest interface with other countries. Some explanation of process may be useful:
  - First, a short meeting was held with all Portuguese-speaking delegates at which the inter-country group process was explained (with the help of an interpreter). It was pointed out that only one of these groups could be supported by simultaneous interpretation (for logistical and budgetary reasons). Those who were comfortable participating in English-speaking groups were encouraged to do so, in order to avoid a situation where delegates from Mozambique and Angola would interact only with each other, and not with delegates from other countries. As it happened, only four delegates asked to be in the group with simultaneous translation. These delegates were assigned to Group 1.
  - The next step made use of a list of delegates, arranged by countries. The four delegates assigned to Group 1 were given the number “1”. The remaining

delegates were numbered from 1-10 in turn (with an adjustment to the number of people in group 1 to ensure an equal number of delegates were assigned to each group). The secretariat then prepared a new list of delegates, grouped according to these numbers. This resulted in 10 groups of seven or eight delegates each. A resource person was assigned randomly to each group, and each group was assigned to a round-table for their group work.

- The resource people debated whether the groups should be “shuffled” each day, so that each delegate would be exposed to more of their peers from other countries, but it was decided that the return on the additional effort and confusion was not warranted. As it turned out several of the groups announced they would not have agreed to “shuffling” because they formed a bond with each other and their resource person, and felt their time was used more productively by staying together.
- In order to stimulate inter-country dialogue the resource team decided they would not facilitate or chair the groups, but would rather act as rapporteurs and provide minimal inputs – for example where they could see the group was straying too far from the topic, or missing an important area of discussion. Each group was asked to elect their own chairperson – possibly on a rotational basis. This approach worked very well.
- Each group was given a flip-chart, but few made use of this. There were concerns that the groups would disturb each other, since nine groups were in the same hall, but the tables were well spaced and no problems were experienced. Group 1 remained in the plenary hall, to make use of the simultaneous interpretation equipment.
- The inter-country groups were given a “topic guide” to assist them in their discussions on each theme (attached). Some groups conformed quite closely to these guides, others diverged from them or used only one or two elements.
- Each evening the resource people came together to compile a list of key issues which emerged from their respective groups into one “recap” document, which was presented the following morning to the plenary. This recap was organised under the following headings: what is working well?; critical elements; challenges; and next steps. Some discomfort was experienced (was it by delegates or resource people?) over the fact that these headings were not the same as the list of issues in the “topic guides” but the resource team opted to have a simple and uniform set of headings to organise delegates’ inputs.
- Country team meetings were held each day after the inter-country groups. Delegates were asked to use what they had learned from their peers to review their own thinking on their response to OVC in their own country. On the penultimate afternoon and evening of the workshop the country teams were asked to compile a next-steps matrix (see annex). These were presented by each country team on the last morning to at least two other countries for peer review. This was done in a series of mini-plenaries (one comprising four countries and two mini-plenaries comprising three countries each) since it would have taken too long for all countries to present to a combined audience. This approach has been used in previous workshops and, once again, it worked well.
- Delegate expectations – were collected on the first day, by asking all delegates to write their own expectations down on a piece of paper and hand them in. Fortunately there was a reasonable match between the expectations of the audience and the conveners. If this

had not been the case, the conveners could have done something about it – eg: consult the audience, adjust workshop content etc.

- Workshop evaluation – a form was distributed (see annex) to the audience on the third day, with a request to hand them to any resource person the following day so they could be collated and reported back during the closing session. Despite several reminders only 13 forms (out of about 80) were returned. However the open-question format seemed to work well and no “false” answers were received (ie: misinterpreting the question). An alternative method was discussed but not used, namely to get each resource person to interview (one, two, as many as possible) delegates, perhaps using the same questions, and then collate data. This may have worked better, but would have been considerably more time-consuming for both delegates and resource persons, all of whom were under pressure of time. An interview method was used in Windhoek and was considered successful, although time-consuming.

### **3.0 Logistics**

#### Preparation time

Although the Maseru workshop was planned for a number of months, various factors resulted in much of the detailed planning and preparation of documents being left until the last 10 weeks, and the formal invitations being sent out just (???) weeks in advance of the workshop.

It is technically feasible to organise a workshop in three weeks. However the shorter the preparation time, the more compromises will need to be made – such as recruiting second-choice resource people, rushing preparatory work, and making a very bad impression on those who are invited to attend. Last-minute also planning makes it difficult to anticipate and respond to problems which may arise.

Of course starting earlier does not automatically guarantee better quality – the time needs to be used intelligently, and deadlines met. Organising a workshop with six months’ notice makes it possible to recruit and prepare country-focal points and resource people early, which in turn means that the country selection and preparation process can be more thorough, pre-workshop documentation can be better prepared and reviewed, and logistical preparations can be more robust.

#### Translations

Languages are a difficult issue in any meeting involving delegates who do not speak a common language. Yet it is essential not to hold separate workshops for people who speak different languages, in order to maximise the sharing of experience and ideas. Several lessons can be learned from the Maseru experience, which involved delegates from eight Anglophone and two Lusophone countries (Mozambique and Angola):

- The basic preparatory document (briefing papers) was translated into Portuguese by UNICEF in Mozambique, before the workshop. This worked well – the only problem being that the English version underwent minor revision during this time, which were not reflected in the Portuguese version. This could be avoided by finalising the documents earlier.
- Simultaneous interpretation was provided in all sessions, although during the small-group work in the afternoons it was available to only one group. The SI threatened to go disastrously wrong when the first team of interpreters proved to be so poorly chosen that they were misleading the audience (whether it was Portuguese translated to English, or English to Portuguese). On the second day a delegate from UNICEF Angola manned the interpreter’s booth while a more experienced interpreter was flown in to take over for the

last three days. Unfortunately only one skilled interpreter could be found at such short notice, which placed great strain on her (simultaneous interpreters invariably work in teams of two, and rotate each half-hour) and this, too, could have been disastrous had she not displayed remarkable endurance. The lesson learned was to be more careful to employ suitable interpreters. Simultaneous interpretation is, unfortunately, very expensive, but economising in this area can easily marginalise non-English speaking countries. If the money can be found, it is recommended that at least two teams of two interpreters each should be employed for similar workshops in future.

- While the structure of the workshop proved to be effective it is, unfortunately, hard on interpreters, since the entire day involves interpreted sessions. The interpreter was even used for the country team work since the resource person working with Mozambique spoke no Portuguese. This, again, is an important lesson learned – the resource team should include bilingual members.
- Regrettably the documentation handed out during the workshop – including the agenda and evaluation form – were not translated into Portuguese. Although the Portuguese delegates did not complain, this situation should not be allowed to recur.

Simultaneous interpretation equipment – the table-top microphone system worked better than roving microphones, not requiring ushers and allowing for dialogue between two or more people.

Events management – unfortunately, it is necessary to constantly cross-check the work of the events company (this was found in both Windhoek and Maseru) – eg: make sure flip-chart paper and markers are refreshed, that PowerPoint equipment is set up, that teas are on time, that meal-tickets are available, that delegate lists are compiled properly etc. Nevertheless, it is much better to use an events manager than to attempt to do this internally. The conveners should insist that the manager of the events company delegates all routine tasks (rather than doing them him/herself) so the manager can ensure quality control and is constantly available to the conveners.

Travel coordinator – serious consideration should be given to employing an experienced travel agent or travel coordinator to reconfirm airline tickets, arrange transfers, trace lost luggage etc, rather than entrusting this to an events company, unless the events company can demonstrate real experience in this area.

Registration forms – see annex. No problems experienced.

Handouts – a good conference bag certainly makes a good impression. Placing a table in the foyer where delegates could take copies of any documents they wanted also worked well. However the idea of asking delegates to post notes of resources they needed, or could offer other countries, on a notice-board did not elicit any response from delegates.

Attendance lists – see annex. Quality check to minimise spelling errors and omissions (possibly post a draft on a notice-board for comment before finalising and distributing). Many people are offended by having their names misspelled, and correcting these mistakes later (for example after certificates of attendance have been handed out) can be extremely disruptive.

Certificates of attendance – see annex. These are very popular with delegates, but they can be enormously time-consuming for the secretariat. To minimise this risk, ensure the spelling of names is accurate (so certificates don't have to be re-printed because of spelling errors or omissions) and the certificates are printed early in the workshop (so there is plenty of time for the designated people to sign them). Hand out certificates in batches to country leaders, not to delegates individually (too time-consuming).

Delegates' costs – as in previous workshops, country delegations were expected to arrange their own transport and pay for their own accommodation. Nobody complained about this,

and very few problems were experienced (apart from luggage lost by the airline – see below). The only problems, which did arise were where the conference organisers attempted to solve problems on behalf of the delegates, i.e.: by providing road transport from Johannesburg. Those delegates who hired their own vehicles had no problems.

Lost luggage – it was useful to turn the negative into a positive by referring to members of the ‘exclusive lost luggage club’ and singling out those affected for beneficial treatment (ie: facilitating compensation by the airline and arranging a shopping trip to spend this compensation).

### **III. Overall Conclusion**

The review of the workshop by resource persons, rated the workshop as having been highly successful. Out of 10, the average overall rating given to the workshop was 8. The areas that worked out well included:

- Communication and dialogue amongst partners
- Working facilities
- Resource persons and
- Workshop structure.

Areas requiring improvement include:

- Early communication with country delegations, allowing lead-time for in country processes.
- Better management of travel arrangements for country delegations (especially airport pick up and drop, including follow up of any mishaps like lost luggage).
- Quality control issues especially of the logistics firm, events management firm and the simultaneous translations.
- Resource persons should minimise their interjections during plenary discussions and should avoid any debates that might undermine the central objective of strengthening national responses.

The overall conclusion from country delegations and the resource persons alike is that this workshop was an essential component of the process for scaling up national responses to meet the UNGASS goals. It provided an opportunity:

- For countries to reflect and review their commitments made at previous workshops
- For country delegates to improve their knowledge of the situations of orphans and vulnerable children and to view their local contexts in the light of global paradigms
- For countries to provide peer review of the processes happening in sister countries.
- It initiated and strengthened partnerships and networking among delegations. Many were able to make plans for inter-country exchange visits for technical support.
- It generated the momentum and regional movement required to scale up the response at the scale and pace commensurate with the growing OVC challenge.
- Each participating country delegation went away with their own deliverable, a matrix of activities that they hope to undertake as next steps to ensure that their national response is scaled up and strengthened.

#### **IV. Next steps**

- Family Health International to develop the Lessons learned paper.
- The Technical working papers to be finalised and circulated widely as a resource for the countries as they implement their process. There is need to add data to the papers to make them regionally representative and they should be turned into a “How to”. Papers should be translated into appropriate languages before they are circulated.
- Draft report to be ready for circulation among peer reviewers by Nov 26<sup>th</sup>. After the review, the report will be revised, finalised and distributed widely.
- Donor meetings in-country should be encouraged to increase collaboration and identify new resources for this process.
- Possibility of identifying independent local consultants to facility the process in country
- Ensuring the follow on activities within the country.
  - Identify focal point persons from among the three partners and have them own the process of facilitating country delegations to implement their commitments
  - Country delegations should be encouraged to utilise the in-country mechanisms which already exist to implement the five themes.

#### **V. Next Workshop**

On the basis of the acclaimed relevance and success of the Southern African Workshop, it was agreed that there is need for these workshops to be held in all the Sub-regions. There is value and momentum added to the process.

UNICEF and USAID (Jean Claude and Peter McDermott) will hold a meeting in West Africa, to determine the appropriate dates, location and other issues for the two meetings (Francophone and Anglophone West Africa). UNICEF ESARO (Sara Norton and Mark Connolly) will advise on the one for Eastern Africa.